

NEW YORK'S OFFICIAL AUNT LIVES THE SIMPLE LIFE

Adviser to the Mayor's Food Committee Proves in Her Own Household How Five Can Live on \$12 a Week

NEW YORK'S official aunt is also the mother of the children of hope. If she were not she would not be able to give such good advice on how to keep down the high living cost.

She is a submerged authoress. Her principal literary work is a book on domestic science just issued by the Mayor's Food Supply Committee and entitled "Hints to Housewives." She can speak good English and better Swedish, and although she is not given much to rhetorical flourishes she can say exactly what she means. A woman who can support herself and feed and clothe four children on \$12 a week and save money must have clear and definite ideas.

As investigator and adviser for Mayor Mitchell's committee, of which George W. Perkins is the chairman, New York's official aunt stands for every hint and every recipe in the new book. She knows about them all by practical experience. Among her collaborators were the domestic science department of the Board of Education, John Buckle, William H. Childs, George Erasmus, M. Maurice Eckstein, Carl A. Koelsch, L. J. Lippmann and William C. Muschenheim. Many of her associates have had experience in serving food in large quantities for clients who range from that of the Cafe des Enfants to that of the Hotel Astor. When a recipe for the use of the public was brought down to the final and workable equation, however, the question always was: "What does Mrs. Kihlgren say?"

Now, Mrs. Selma Kihlgren never thought that her say would be worth anything on such a subject as household economics until about three years ago. Then Mr. Perkins, who was taking a deep interest in the food crisis, asked his butler a question one day.

"Emil," he inquired, "do you happen to know any sensible, practical woman who is managing to get along on little or nothing?"

The butler said that his sister was such a one, and that was how the career of the city's official aunt began.

Her husband, who had died only three weeks before, had been a rigger in the employ of an electric light company. His wages were \$12.50 a week. Through the good management of his wife something remained in the bank to tide the family over for a while.

New York is the city of institutions. On every hand is the offer of help. They say that in some parts of the city a fight for orphans and half-orphaned and that various funds and agencies are always on the lookout for likeable and handsome children. Erik, Axel, Helen and Harry Kihlgren are all that. Their hair is like that of the fair daughters of the ancient scags and their cheeks are as white as the hues of health. Now they run up and down the stepladder of life starting with 11 at the top and stopping at 6 years.

Kept the Family Together.

"It was such hard work," said Mrs. Kihlgren.

"Yes," assented The Sun reporter, "to support so many, you mean, on so little."

"Oh, no, not that," she answered.

"To keep the institutions away from them. I didn't know that there were such chances as that. Why, I could have sent them all to homes. It took all the will I had to stand out."

"Yes, they would have been well taken care of, and that's no mistake. I could have gone out and got a job as cook for \$60 a month and dressed well and had a good time. But tell me, what would have been the use of that?"

"They were my children—and his. If I sent them away from me they and I would have drifted further and further apart and some day I would realize that I had missed all in life that was worth the living. I made up my mind that I would never give them up and that they would be with me while their habits were forming, so that I could look after them day and night. I did it. I made up my mind to it."

"You never can tell what you can do in this world until you have to do it, the dear man who has gone used to say so often. Well, I said to myself that I just had to do this for my children and so these three years we have held together. They are all in school and they are going to high school, too, and then they are going to do work in this world which will count for something and I expect to live to see every one of them make good."

The next winter Mrs. Kihlgren was as pilot and investigator for the committee. She knew so much about the details of buying that there was not a section of New York which she did not soon have duly charted. She reckoned for the imaginary family of five as she did for her own real family.

"It's all a matter of thinking," said she. "Anybody can manage if he or she sits down and looks far ahead and plans where every penny is going and sees that the plan is carried right out to the last cent. The plan has to go along and saved money besides."

"My wages were \$12 a week, when I was with the committee regularly and there was nothing lost. At first I lived in East 104th street, Manhattan, and so I learned the part of the city and its stores until I knew it like a book. What I learned and what I planned I talked to the young man that ran the typewriter, and then the committee put it into better English."

"I am not writing books. I tell folks how to do things for the time. This book is made up of all the pamphlets and the leaflets we had before, with a lot more things which were found out since. Of course, the prices are going higher all the time and it takes more thinking to keep up with the game."

Hints on Food Buying.

"One of the first things to remember in buying food for a family of growing children especially is not to go to the cheap butcher shops. I never do. I pick out the best looking and the best kept butcher shop, no matter how expensive it looks, and walk right in and order cheap steak."

"Why not? I am getting meat of the same quality and from the same animals that the wealthy folks are. The cheap steak may be just as good as the porterhouse, although not quite

so tender. The high class butcher is willing to sell those cheaper cuts at a moderate price.

"The other night I bought 36 cents worth of chuck steak at one of the best shops in this neighborhood. It was delicious—a pound and a half of as good meat as I ever tasted. The porterhouse in the cheap shop is no better than the chuck steak at the high class place."

"I go into one of those high class meat stores and look around sharp. I see that the lady who has just gone out has left the ends of the steak on the block. She told the butcher that she did not care for that streak of lean and bit of fat. She paid for it all the same and she should have taken it along."

"Well, there it is, nice and fresh. The butcher sells it to me for 25 cents a pound. I cook it very carefully into a stew. First of all, the meat is browned in very hot fat, so that the juices will be kept inside of it, and then it is cooked into a tasty dish. What better meal could any one wish than that?"

"You know often when a woman thinks she is saving money she is extravagant. Often when you seem to be throwing money away you are really saving some. The other night I went to the butcher and asked him what he had which was really good. He said that he had bought more broilers than he should and that knowing that I was a close buyer he would let me have broilers for the same price as fricasees."

"I bought two broilers, weighing four and a quarter pounds in all, at 22 cents a pound. That was like plunging, wasn't it?—a person in my circumstances spending \$1.21 for chicken. It made a good meal and there was something left. Suppose that I had bought a cheap, scrawny little cold storage pullet, that had been freezing and thawing all over the country and finally turned black in my icebox. No economy in that and maybe sickness besides."

"One of the secrets of living cheaply and well is to get out of just food habits and try something new. If potatoes go up, rice is good and so is macaroni. Hardly anybody realizes how good and nutritious barley is. Of course, now barley has to be cooked for four hours. Looks like wasting a lot of gas, doesn't it? But suppose you cook a whole lot of it and keep the pot on for the same time. That's different, isn't it?"

"The whole idea of getting much food for little money is in watching for your opportunities of using new ideas that come along. Now those fireless cookers are expensive in some places. They cost from \$8 to \$20, but any woman who will take the trouble to buy a brand new garbage pail and a little sawdust can make one herself for almost nothing. It seems wonderful like, now, doesn't it, that you can cook something all night without any fire."

"The great trouble with so many women is that they will not take the trouble to cook food. You can't bring

up strong children on delicatessen. The children know the difference between real food and the make believe. It's wonderful how keen they are to know the right kind."

"I know that without going far away from here to find out about it, and I think that is the reason why I am getting along so well with this lunch room over the Brooklyn school, where I am doing the cooking and serving the

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Mrs. Selma Kihlgren, New York city's official aunt, and her four children. They are being brought up in a common sense, economical way.

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